
3.3 Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

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Synopsis: Search Engine Optimization guidelines for State of Georgia sites.

Purpose

There are a lot of unknowns in how search engines index pages, and a lot of that happens outside of the content manager's direct control. However, you can implement the following suggestions to help increase search engine rankings and ensure that content is easy to index.

3.3.1 Keywords

It's important to determine which keywords you want to target before adding them to your page. When selecting keywords, be sure to use terms that are relevant to your page content, as well as terms that your target audience would use when searching for that topic.

Analytics data can be an invaluable tool for helping to determine which terms your audience is using to perform internal content searches; those common search terms can become your keywords for individual topics. You may also look to online tools that analyze keyword relevance for individual topic pages. The Resources section of this page lists some free online tools that can help.

Keywords **SHOULD** be included in the following places on a page:

- **<title>tag** - The title tag must be short (6 or 7 words at most) and the keyword must be near the beginning.
- **URL** - e.g., <http://dhs.georgia.gov/parent-children-services> [1], where "Parent and Children Services" is the keyword phrase
- **Heading tags** - <h1>, <h2>, etc.
- **Alt tags** - Web spiders can't read images, so the alt text of an image tells search engines how to categorize the graphic. e.g., for an image of a generic Georgia driver's license.
- **Body text of a document** - your main keywords should be salted throughout the body text of the document, including near the beginning of the article, where possible. Be sure these terms are relevant to the page content.
- **Meta tags** - while many main search engines do not use <meta> keyword tags in their rankings, including keywords in meta tags will aid in the Georgia.gov internal search categorization of content. Be sure to keep the number of keywords to 20 words or less.
- **Keyword formatting** - use bold and italic formatting to emphasize keywords and key phrases when relevant to the page content.

Keywords SHOULD NOT be used in the following ways:

- **Keyword stuffing** - DO NOT overuse keywords in the hopes of increasing rankings.
- **Keyword dilution** - DO NOT try to use a lot of different keywords in one article, as this will not only confuse the reader but will dilute the power of the main keywords.
- **Keyword misspelling** - DO NOT intentionally misspell keywords - standard search engines already compensate for user error in misspelling keywords.

Notes for Portal customers:

- In some CMS configurations, such as the Vignette and Drupal CMSes used to support Portal customer websites, putting keywords in the title of a content item will ensure that the terms are listed in the `<title>` tag and the Friendly URL for the page.
- The Drupal CMS will use the Keywords field to further index your content for internal searches, so it is important that you use selective keywords for all your content.

3.3.2 Links

- **Link Text** - Link text needs to be explicit to describe the page to which the link directs.
 - DO use the title of a page or a description of page content for a link, e.g. "[Forms and Publications?](#) or [For livestock prices, see the Farmers and Consumers Market Bulletin.](#)"
 - DO NOT use "Click Here"
 - DO NOT use a long URL path as the link to a URL
 - DO NOT use images in place of text links for navigation. When an image link accompanies a text link, be sure to use the alt and title attributes appropriately to identify the image and content.
- **Anchor title tag** - where possible, include a title attribute to the link tag to further clarify the destination link. e.g., ``

3.3.3 Meta Tags

- **Description metatag** - Each page should have its own unique Description meta tag that describes the content of the page. The description should be less than 155 characters, or approximately 25 words.
- **Refresh metatag** - DO NOT use the refresh metatag. 301 redirects should be used instead.

3.3.4 Content

- **Content updates** - content should be regularly edited and updated to keep it fresh, and to boost site rankings.
- **Copyrighted Content** - DO NOT use content verbatim from another website. All web content should be unique to the page.

3.3.5 Graphics and Multimedia

- **Javascript** - Javascript can be used for supplemental content and effects. DO NOT display main content with Javascript, as it may prevent search engines from ranking the content.
- **Images** - be sure to include alt text for all images related to the content of a page. e.g., `` for an image of a generic Georgia driver?s license.
- **Frames** - DO NOT use frames, as they prevent search engines from indexing the content of your pages.
- **Flash, Video, and Podcasts** - be sure to give it an alternative textual description for multimedia elements that would not otherwise be indexed by search engines. (e.g., via "alt," "longdesc," or in element content).

3.3.6 Domains, URLs, Configurations

- **File names** - Files should have short, descriptive names, with words separated by hyphens. e.g., `license-renewal-form.pdf`
- **Broken Links** - Be sure to regularly check for broken links within the website. Broken links within your site can prevent search engines from appropriately indexing your website. Broken links can also devalue how search engines rank the quality of your content.
- **Sitemap** - At minimum, the site should link to a complete and up-to-date HTML sitemap. It is also recommended to provide Google with an XML sitemap if possible, [per their requirements](#) [2].
- **Dynamic URLs** - Spiders prefer static URLs, over long, irrelevantly-named dynamic URLs. When using a CMS to manage content, it is best to use a tool that will rewrite dynamic URLs into static, human- and SEO-friendly URLs.

3.3.7 References

- [List of Best and Worst practices for designing a high traffic website](#) [3]

3.3.8 Resources

XML Sitemap Generator

- [XML-Sitemaps](#) [4]

Keyword Analysis

- [Google Keyword Tool](#) [5]
- [Wordstream Keyword Tools](#) [5]

SEO Analyzer

- [Meta Tag Analyzer](#) [6]

Broken Link Checkers

- [Xenu](#) [7](strange site but the free downloadable link checker is very good)
- [Google Webmaster Tools](#) [8](Diagnostics > Crawl Errors lists broken links)

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